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AUTHOR Dawson, John
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ABSTRACT

The development of the Best Practice Descriptor Statements by the New South Wales (NSW) Department of School Education provides schools with a set of criteria that will help them to become not only self-managing but self-monitoring. In this context, schools will be able to report on the health of their organization, resource needs, and staff development needs. This paper describes one principal's approach to the use of best practices statements in a school setting, with a focus on the teaching and learning dimension. The paper outlines the process used in the development of a school culture for the implementation of best practices and describes how the teaching-and-learning best practices statements were used as a tool for staff development and for a whole-school assessment approach. Three figures are included. (Contains 19 references.) (Author/LMI)

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USING BEST PRACTICE CRITERIA IN SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT: A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE

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John Dawson
Principal, Mayfield West Demonstration School

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USING BEST PRACTICE CRITERIA IN SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT: A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE

Abstract: The development of the Best Practice Descriptor Statements by the NSW Department of School Education (Carroll, 1994) provides schools with a set of criteria that will enable them to become not only self managing but self monitoring. In this context, schools will be able to report on the health of their organisation, resource needs and training and development needs. This paper presents one Principal's approach to the use of Best Practices Statements in a school setting, with an emphasis on the best practices statement dimension — Teaching and Learning. The paper will outline the process used in the development of a school culture for the implementation of Best Practices, the vision and framework for change illustrated by some uses for the Teaching and Learning Best Practices Statements as a tool for staff development, and a whole school approach to assessment and reporting in which Best Practices Statements becomes the focus for enhancing student outcomes in the classroom.

THE CHALLENGE

The development of Quality Assurance processes in the NSW Department of School Education has provided a challenge for schools in determining how to respond to the issues evident in the Statements of Best Practices in Teaching and Learning. The challenge for each school is to:

- Identify teacher, student and parent needs in the area of teaching and learning using the best practices descriptor statements as the criteria for staff development, student programs, parent education and strategic planning through the gathering of information in a variety of ways. This information will then be used at a school level to determine the allocation of resources to support the implementation of quality teaching and learning programs.
- Develop strategic school plans, school programs and student programs that will enable the initiation of teaching and learning best practices at a student level, teacher and parent level.
- Develop strategic plans that will enable schools to use the descriptor statements of Teaching and Learning to become self monitoring; and
- Provide strategies that will see the descriptors developed according to the life cycle of the school and its community.

The ultimate challenge for schools will be to use the best practices statements in teaching and learning to further develop individual student outcomes appropriate for the next century.

DEVELOPMENT OF A SCHOOL CULTURE

In the development of a student-centred culture at Mayfield West Demonstration School, the initial step was to increase awareness through the development of a transitional process that focused on beliefs about student learning and future trends for educating for 2000 and beyond. There are two issues that are important in the development of the student-centred school, which Brandes and Ginnis (1990) identify as *ownership* and *climate*. They believe that responsibility can be shared through the school community, but the 'right conditions' must be nurtured if progress is to be made. Beare, Caldwell and Millikan (1989) state that culture is about the creation of a climate within which children learn and which is powerfully persuasive in these learnings.

The first stage of the transitional process was to articulate to staff a vision that outlined my beliefs in relation to student-centred schooling and how I believed this model would involve all stakeholders in that organisation.

The goal in this transitional process was to put into place a framework that would allow a culture to develop that encompassed a common vision that would continually strive to align strategy, structure and systems within the context of the stated vision, mission and beliefs of the school. Following the initial awareness raising, staff then took part in a development process where they identified the role of the principal and developed the role statement based on the input from a number of meetings using co-operative learning group structures. (See Figure 1: Strategies for Implementation of the role of the Principal.)

The ***Vision*** was to:

> Work in partnership with staff, students and parents by empowering them to be decision makers towards 2000 and beyond. As principal my role was to lead, develop, manage and communicate with staff, students and parents.

The vision is based on a belief that student learning should be student centred, process focused and learning for life. This process, which was new to all key stakeholders, saw the beginning of a 'paradigm shift' to whole school leadership that was centred on empowerment and ownership in decision making through the development of all stakeholders in the school. Covey (1992) outlines the importance of the process of *empowerment* at the *management* level and *alignment* at the *organisational* level. He states that people are empowered to judge themselves because their knowledge transcends any measurement system. Further, in an organisation of trust, the organisational structure will be very flat and the span of control will be very wide.

FIGURE 1

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL	
Visible Presence in Our School	• Class visits • Morning assembly • Afternoon crossing • Face to face teaching
Communication	• Open door policy • Staff Bulletin • Team Meetings • Clarification of role and responsibilities
Support Assist Staff, Students and Parents	<u>Students</u> • Visits to other classes • Involvement in School Council • School events • Programs, Peer Support, Welfare Network <u>Staff</u> • Visits to other rooms • Identify needs • Support networks • Direct involvement in staff development • Professional Development • Staff Welfare <u>Parents</u> • Setting up support networks • Parent education • Helpers in classrooms
Flexibility	• Listen to ideas and opinions • Open Forum - staff report open to development team.
Consulting and Caring	• Awareness of staff, students and parents needs • Working knowledge • Access to those seeking advice, guidance support

Supportive	• Realistic Goal Setting • Praise and encouragement to those who truly deserve it • Consistency • Awareness of school environment as a whole • Pacing change and information of new ideas, concepts • Communicate change • All whole staff development – decision making • Allow for individual growth and differences of teaching style and personalities • Encourage goal setting of staff in professional and teaching activities
Community Involvement	• Classroom support – parent helpers • Co-ordinate working bees • School Council • Class Meetings • Parent nights • Social activities as whole school
Develop Whole Staff Decision Making	• Social Circle • Some decisions need to be made by Development Team • Present staff with various decision making strategies • Make staff aware of decisions • Staff development committee to determine inservice choices • Share Principals expertise • Staff to use channels
Accountable for Efficient Management of School Budget	• Aware of Budget • Involvement of Teams • Planning
Maintain High Morals Communication and Team Building	• Attend Meetings • Share Information for Development Days • Happy Grammar • Genuine Praise • Consistency • Considerate • Compassionate • Provide special celebrations, treats at end of hectic times

FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE THROUGH A NEW PARADIGM

Following from Covey's principles, one challenge for educators in schools is to develop models that will allow them to manage change and provide a framework for empowerment and the alignment of beliefs of the organisation. To cope with such change and manage it on a whole school level, the leadership style needs to be one of adaptability in which the major task is one of transforming the values of the organisation to higher levels. As Peters (1991) outlines, transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.

Spady and Marshall (1991) believe that Transformational Outcome-Based Education gives schools a profoundly different means of restructuring themselves in the changing education environment. They define outcomes as a successful demonstration of learning that occurs at a *culminating point of learning experience.* There are a number of key elements in this model, including the need to:

- Ensure Clarity of Focus on Outcomes of Significance.
- Design Down from Ultimate Outcomes.
- Emphasise High Expectations for All to Succeed.
- Provide Expanded Opportunity and Support for Learning Success.

These elements are supported by Fullan (1991, pp 63-64) who states that:

> "The considerations in planning for adoption for change is in the initiation process. In this change process there are three R's of relevance, readiness and resources. Relevance includes the interaction of need, clarity, of the innovation. Readiness involves the school's practical and conceptual capacity to innovate, develop, or adopt a given innovation. Resources concern the accumulation of the provision of support as a part of the change process. It is within this context that a framework was developed for whole school change which was embedded in the concept of Quality Teaching . The question to be contemplated is, how well do the students learn in the context of the school organisation, teaching and learning strategies and the assessment and evaluation processes that are in place?"

In the present context, the best practices statements are used as the agents of change for student learning. Figure 2 outlines the model used to develop the framework for whole school change. In this phase the initial step was to develop an integrated and co-ordinated school plan across three key learning areas: Human Society and Its Environment, Science and Technology and Health and Personal Development. The linking key learning area was English. The overview plan is outlined in Figure 3. This figure outlines the development of the model which is based on the identification of a bank of

FIGURE 2

OVERVIEW CO-ORDINATED INTEGRATED KLA FOCUS PLAN P-6

STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION
- Flexibility in organisation
- Team teaching
- P-6 whole school
- Grade development teams
- Links industry, High School
- Peer support K-6 Groups

QUALITY TEACHING
Characterised by trained and motivated staff who deliver teaching learning programs that are student based. Supported by identification of clear outcomes, appropriate resources and incentives to deliver quality programs P-6.

STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS
- Broadband timetabling
- Co-operative planning
- Special liaison
- Development Teams
- K-6 groups
- Sharing

PLANNING
- Identification of criteria to be used in planning curriculum selecting content and evaluation
- Decisions about curriculum involve the needs of system level and student needs

STUDENT OUTCOMES
- **Student centred learning**
- **Skills Based**
- **Process Based**

INCENTIVES
- Empowerment
- Planned Units
- Time to plan sequence and develop responsive evaluation strategies
- Budgets
- Upskilling

QUALITY PROGRAMS

Characterised by clear and relevant student centred outcomes based on the "Values We Teach 91".
Needs of Students, Syllabus Outcomes, AchievableTeaching Learning Activities, Appropriate resourcing strategies. With flexibility to respond to changing environmental agents.
Based on whole school planning and co-operative unit planning

PROGRAM DELIVERY
- Student outcomes based on student needs
- Integrated planning
- Emphasis on strategies & assessment
- Mapping learning styles & process.

REPORTING - ASSESSMENT
- Outcome Tracking whole school
- Emphasis on the learner
- Continuous assessment model

FIGURE 3

DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATED - CO-ORDINATED PLAN

OVERVIEW

Development of School Community Outcomes

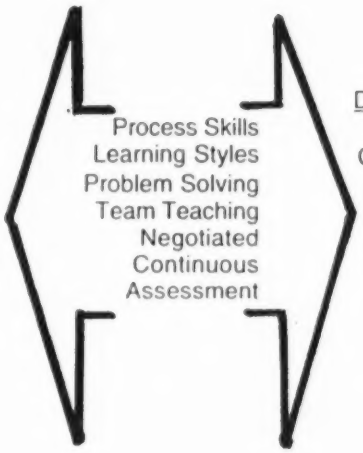
Identify components of School Plan based on ...

DESIGN
- School Needs
- Values we Teach
- Identification of teacher/student/community needs values and preferences

DOWN MODEL
- KLA syllabi, perspectives, aims of primary education
- National profiles

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CO-ORDINATED PLAN

PHASE 1	Content Model - Whole School Planning
PHASE 2	Resourcing/Integrating/ Sequencing
PHASE 3	Identifying Outcomes Corporate Programming Building a Resource Bank
PHASE 4	Implementing Program Policy Initiating/Implementing mapping of teaching/program strategies
PHASE 5	Evaluation



TRAINING/ DEVELOPMENT
- Quality Teaching
- Thinking Skills
- Learning Styles
- Creative Play

student outcomes in line with NSW syllabus guidelines and the National Profiles in the Human Society Key Learning Area.

Principles underpinning the model

This model of school change is underpinned by a number of key principles, each of which is supported by current research. These principles are elaborated below, together with a brief description of their implications for practice at Mayfield West Demonstration School.

Chief among these principles is the belief in student-centred learning. Being student centred means that students should be actively involved in making decisions about the content and direction of their own learning. This principle is itself recognised in the Best Practice descriptor statements in that it encourages teachers to "understand and apply the learning theory that underpin syllabus documents . . . and . . . construct classroom practice based on knowledge which is supported by critical reflection, reading and research".

This belief in active student learning underpins many current syllabus documents. For example, the Ministry of Education Victoria (1989) state that it is important that learners evaluate their own performance, and that teachers actively teach and model self analytical and questioning approaches to learning. This view is also articulated in the best practices draft statement (Nov, 1993).

Literacy is the key vehicle for developing an integrated approach in all curriculum areas. In Mayfield West Demonstration School, this means that English is the basis for integration across all Key Learning Areas. Support for this practice is articulated by Pigdon and Woolley (1992, p 6) who state that an integrated approach allows learners to explore, gather, process, refine and present information about topics they want to investigate without the constraints imposed by traditional subject barriers. Best Practices Statements (3.3) state the expectation that "Teachers [will] recognise and use student learning which occurs beyond the classroom" . . . and . . . "Teaching programs [will] reflect appropriate balance to cater for the interests, needs and abilities of the whole child".

Howard Gardner (1993, pp211-214) supports this belief that the fundamental idea of whole-language programs is to immerse children as early as possible in the world of text and to allow them to be become meaningful apprentices to competent literate individuals. Gardner also states that an integrated unit of work constitutes a powerful example of what it is like to use such skills in the prosecution of meaningful activities, activities that can be informative and enjoyable in the manner of effective integrated school -based activities that are integrated with more intuitive forms of knowing. Teaching and Learning Best Practices descriptor statement (2.2) reflects the

intention that students [will] understand the nature and purpose of [their] learning experiences.

The classroom climate and teaching and learning strategies should enable students to respond in writing to genres to knowledge and experience that are gained from the information gathering process through reading and the use of thinking skills. Students should be exposed to thinking skills and their application and develop the ability to reflect, infer, hypothesise and generalise in a constructed learning environment. Wilson and Wing Jan (1993, p2) state that teachers should reflect on their own teaching and learning, they must be able to make process and reasons for reflecting explicit in their students. They believe it is essential to model reflective thinking strategies, the outcome for students will result in reflective and metacognitive thinking becoming a natural part of the teaching and learning process.

Collins and Dalton (1990, pp19-20) believe that effective teaching is where students take increasing responsibility for their own learning through teaching students the skills involved in learning how-to-learn, providing opportunities for risk-taking and time for feedback and reflection, students contracting to maximise the chance of both challenge and success for students and providing opportunities for students to negotiating with their teacher to develop strategies and activities that support individual needs. Best Practices descriptors clearly support this view and set the direction for teachers and schools through the aspect of Student Practices (2.2), that students are actively involved in setting goals and planning activities for their own learning. This Descriptor Statement is further extended into the Aspect of Reflection (2.3), which states that students independently and collaboratively set and adjust their goals and future learning strategies as a result of their reflections.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF BEST PRACTICES STATEMENTS IN THE AREAS OF PROGRAMMING, ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

PROGRAMMING

In order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning whilst reducing the time spent in planning the following process was implemented:

- A corporate planning model was used, which involved all staff in a brain storming session to develop a whole school units of work. Concept mapping was used as a tool to help in this process.
- Teams of teachers were released from face to face teaching to further develop units of work at grade level.

- Grade teams used outcome statements to develop outcomes based on the co-ordinated plan.
- A planning overview format was developed that mapped outcomes, strategies, assessment, process skills, scope and sequence to take account of learning styles, values and attitudes.

The intention is that teachers will not only implement the best practice descriptors referring to the value of collaborative working relations through these processes, but also build into their programs best practices relating to student learning.

ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

The ways in which teachers gather information about their own teaching and their students is crucial to the programming and teaching strategies that address the individual needs of students. The outcomes movement in education and the development of profile reporting, together with the development of the National Profiles, has shifted the emphasis from quantitative to qualitative data gathering. The move to qualitative measures and their value in reporting to parents about the learner and how the learner learns is supported by Egan (1992, p102), who states that:

> . . . the sensitive teacher will no doubt be able to get an accurate reading on their success, even though it will not be in terms of a precise score.

He goes on to state that there has been considerable development in recent years of what are generally called "qualitative evaluation" procedures. Woodward (1993, p20) develops this theme further in her Negotiated Evaluation Model, where she outlines the value of qualitative information and its role in describing the children's behaviour and achievements. She believes it is well suited to charting individual progress and describing the quality of learning processes and products in the classroom.

The development of the Negotiated Evaluation Model based on that of Woodward was implemented in trial stage at Mayfield West Demonstration School in 1993. The model is well suited to overlaying the best practice descriptor statements and pointers. These statements have the potential to give the model focus and direction in the data gathering process and for setting direction for staff development based on student need. Negotiated Evaluation involves the collection, interpreting and reporting of qualitative information. It focuses on the individual quality of each child's learning processes and products, in order that all those involved in the child's progress can get to know the child better and become better able to assist him or her in the learning processes required for future development.

Three essential aspects of the Negotiated Evaluation Model provide structure to the interaction between the student, teacher and parent in the

collection of data from a variety of sources and perspectives and the analysis of data and writing of reports to inform the participants in the process. These aspects are *continual interaction* of focused observation between teacher and student, self-evaluation by the student and interaction between parent and student through written comment, parent teacher discussion and observation. The *collection of data* comprises observation by parents, teacher and student over time in a variety of situations and samples of work products selected by both student and teacher. The analysis of data is achieved through making decisions about the merit and worth of both the processes (behaviours) and products observed and the collating of these decisions in the writing of a number of reports over the school year.

The work of Cambourne et al (1992) also contributes the Negotiated Evaluation Model as implemented at Mayfield West Demonstration School. Their contribution is reflected in the emphasis given to the need for:

- setting the criteria for assessment and evaluation
- the teacher's role as a responsive evaluator
- expanding the assessment network

The *essential criteria for effective assessment and evaluation* is that the assessment must result in optimal learning for all. Assessment and evaluation must inform, support and justify teacher decision making and reflect the theories of learning that guide our teaching. The findings which result from our assessment and evaluation practices must be accurate, valid, reliable and perceived to be rigorous by all who use them.

A teacher's professional judgement is the key element in the role of *teacher as responsive evaluator* when describing student achievement. This role embraces the need for teachers to know how students learn and progress as learners, make beliefs, understandings, expectations and outcomes explicit and be able to identify pointers, signs, indicators, so that the teacher knows that what he or she is looking for and why. Teachers need to develop a belief that from observation of these pointers, signs and indicators, changes will need to be made in the teaching process as a result. The collection of information through observation, interviews and the selection of work samples from many learning experiences will enable the teacher to reflect on information, identify what students know and what the student needs to know and make professional judgements regarding student progress. The reflection process is important and crucial for commenting on student progress and outlining future strategies for preparing reports for parents and the school.

It is essential that the assessment and reporting network be expanded in schools to enable the development of teaching and learning strategies that will develop student outcomes based on individual needs. The traditional model of assessment and evaluation had three phases, assessment of the student, evaluation by the teacher and reporting to parents. In the context of the Outcomes Based Model and the National Profiles the following areas

need to be added to this network. Assessment of the student needs to include assessment of the group, the program and the teacher. Assessment by the teacher would need to be expanded to assessment by the student, the class the group, the parent and other teachers such as support teachers. The focus on informing parents needs to be centred on improving the student's learning outcomes and outlining to parents future direction in the area of teaching and learning strategies that will enhance their students and enable them to be lifelong learners.

The Best Practices Descriptor Statements have the potential to change teachers', students' and parents' understanding of how students learn and how the information gathered on student learning can be used in the delivery of quality programs. The descriptor statements and pointers enhance the continuous assessment model by providing a focus for Staff Development where teachers and team leaders would be able to discuss individual learners and groups of learners focussing on the aspects and descriptor statements. The change in individual staff development would refocus from what the teacher considered to be their individual need to what are the needs of their class and what do they have to do to address these needs? There are a number of stages in this process:

- Class teacher uses descriptor statements and pointers to identify individual training and development needs in the area of Teacher Beliefs and Knowledge, Professional Training and Development, Planning and Implementation, Assessment and Reporting and Reflection and Evaluation.
- The class teachers then uses these statements as a resource bank to identify descriptors and pointers that need to be addressed to enhance student outcomes in their classroom.
- The teacher then develops and individual plan using the Self-Evaluation and Development Proforma
- The Development Team Leader and the teacher then discuss these needs and develop a Collaborative Action Plan that outlines the teacher's development for the year, when it will happen who will assist and what resources need to be accessed to support this plan.

The best practice statements help to focus the negotiation on the class and the individual student.

Reporting To Parents

The student assessment model adapted at Mayfield West Demonstration School implies that the main means of reporting student progress to parents is through qualitative statements and comments on their performance in the context of the students' particular stage of development.

The descriptor statements are useful to individual staff members to develop criteria banks of key words to use in the reporting process. This strategy is

easily adapted to whole staff and can be part of whole school change and enhances the reporting process by ensuring that the individual needs are identified and the comments are meaningful to the learner and how they are developing as lifelong learners.

The class teachers develop a criterion bank of key words using the Teaching and Learning Descriptors as a resource. They then use these key words to develop comments on student progress and future learning experiences to locate the position of the learner on the outcomes continuum is at and where they intend to go in the learning process. An example of the process is illustrated below.

Example:

Key words from Descriptor Statements

Students select and use:

- appropriate learning styles - a variety of learning styles - actively involved in learning - set goals - plan own learning - solve problems by applying prior experiences - generate and explore new ideas - work independently and collaboratively - share in assessment process - understand the nature and purpose of learning experiences.

Gathering Information

The gathering of information involves the students, class teacher and the development team leader. In this process the teacher and the development team leader develop a strategy to report on the progress of the learner, identify individual needs and class needs, document analysis and the professional training and development needs of the class teacher focusing on the unit of analysis namely the individual student and the class.

The Continuous Assessment Model focuses on the key procedure of observation. In this process it is important that all participants are keen and perceptive observers. Woodward (1993, p 22) emphasises this point and states that there is a need for a more systematic way of organising students and classrooms so as to ensure that all students behaviours are observed and recorded. Woodward outlines the process of focused observation as a process where the teacher selects up to five students to observe over a two week period. This group is closely observed and anecdotal records are made. It is in this context that best practices statements provide the systematic approach that is needed to enhance this model.

Role of the Development Team Leader

The development team leaders role is to support the teacher in two areas:

- Support in the observation process through triangulation that involves observing the students in the classroom and discussing with the student on how they view themselves as learners.
- To work with the teacher in a collaborative setting to determine the training and development needs of the teacher based on the needs of the students with a view to developing strategies that will enhance student outcomes in the classroom.

The focus for this strategy is an observation proforma developed by the "Teaching and Learning Descriptors" Writing Team. The proforma is adapted from the descriptor statements for each area, and is organised under the general headings; Observation, Interview Questions and Expected Behaviours. Within these categories, recorded data is "triangulated" by the development team leader in a subjective process in which each of the pieces of information gathered are weighted against each other to form a coherent judgement about the status of practice in that area. The area to be examined would be nominated by the classroom teacher as part of the overall Reporting and Assessment Plan.

The Development Team Leader and students identify the area for observation and determine what behaviours the leader would be observing in the classrooms in the triangulation process.

At completion of the triangulation process the team leader and teacher discuss the information from the observation and analysis of documents such as samples of work, programs and student self evaluation. From this process student needs are then discussed with the student and teacher and a student report is then collated that involves student and teacher comments and a portfolio of work samples from the area selected by the teacher and student.

CONCLUSION

The Best Practice Statements of Teaching and Learning are at the cutting edge of an interconnected, holistic approach to teaching and learning, based on the belief that the work of schools is to develop learners who have a stake in their own learning and thus will be empowered to be decision makers for the world in the year 2000 and beyond. These statement provide a framework for educators to reflect and develop practices that will enhance teaching and learning across all classrooms and provide challenge for educators to develop strategies that will enable students to be lifelong learners. The challenge is best articulated by David Suzuki (1993,p17) who emphasises the need for reflection and change when he says that if we are to change human activity and transform our perceptions and values, we must take stock of

where we are now. The best practices descriptor statements and pointers provide a pathway for teachers and the challenge to become meta-teachers, that is the chance to become more self-aware and effective with the ability to transform their daily classroom into "best practice". As Dalton and Boyd (1992, p 37) state teachers need to walk the leader's walk by taking more conscious control over what they do and how they do it.

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